



A PATHWAY TO STATE & NATIONAL REFORM TO IMPROVE CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES



Winter 2019 Issue

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This issue of the Title IV-E Well-Being Project (Project) Newsletter features an interview with Kimberly Giardina, County of San Diego Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services discussing San Diego County's approach toward sustainability of the Project practices, services, and programs. It also includes highlights from the 2018 Annual Project Meeting, updates from the Evaluation Progress Report, and a look at upcoming Project activities.

FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY – SAN DIEGO

In preparation for the sunset of the Project on September 30, 2019, participating counties in California are beginning to explore how to sustain the effective services and programs currently funded by Title IV-E Waiver funds.



The newsletter team spoke to Kimberly Giardina from the County of San Diego to learn more about their efforts to prepare for the end of the Project and the transition to traditional Title IV-E funding streams and methods.

Can you tell us how the Project demonstration is going in San Diego County?

We have a very strong infrastructure with positive outcomes, and we are doing our best to sustain what's been working.



Given your experience so far, what aspects of the demonstration have proven to be worthy of sustaining? Why?

The County of San Diego is not just focused on how to sustain the services and programs implemented with the Waiver but thinking more holistically. We are considering the entire system to decide what's making a difference for the children and families in our community. Safety Organized Practice (SOP) is driving the entire system to work in a more engaging way with families. Because of that, we are guided by the question: "is our whole system operating in a manner consistent with the goal of improving the outcomes for our children and families?"

For that reason, we are committing to sustaining SOP which is an organic part of our approach. It's become part of our practice; what workers do, and how they interact and does not involve additional expenditures.

We also value our Family Visit Coaching (FVC) visitation model which does involve expenditures, but, through our holistic approach, we will look at whether any cost-cutting in other areas is necessary in order for us to sustain this valuable model.

What specific sustainability measures are you implementing?

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) has completed an evaluation of FVC - so we have quantitative evidence that children in FVC are more likely to reunify than children who do not participate. But just as exciting as those results have been the comments and feedback that we receive from parents, especially fathers who participate in FVC.

Have you determined whether any aspects of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) may make the sunset of the Project an easier transition for San Diego County?

Yes, the fact that we can access Title IV-E funds for some prevention services does seem to have the potential to make the transition a bit easier. However, the challenge is that California may not be able to begin implementing FFPSA immediately, if they decide to opt in. Additionally, interventions under FFPSA have to be Evidence Based Practices, which limits the kinds of programs that may be funded.



Has the the Project impacted San Diego Child Welfare practice in ways that would not have happened without it?

Yes, although San Diego was already experiencing a downward trend in the number of children in out-of-home care, the Waiver has accelerated our progress. We also used the Waiver to build coaching infrastructure which has resulted in improvements in fidelity.

SOP has also strengthened our capacity to understand and mitigate trauma. Implementing SOP often means that workers engage more deeply with families and it can expose staff to the effects of secondary trauma. We have had to learn and explore how to approach that issue.

Anything else you'd like to highlight about your experience with the Project sustainability process?

In San Diego, we tried to start thinking about sustainability as early as possible, and we have brought in partners and stakeholders to help us with that decision-making process. We probably could not be making such decisions by ourselves, so we are grateful for that input. The earlier other counties participating in the Well-being Project can do that, the more prepared I think they will be.

Annual Waiver Meeting Highlights

The 2018 Annual Well-Being Project Meeting took place in Sacramento on November 13 and 14th. Project counties and stakeholders across the state met to discuss Project accomplishments and challenges, the evaluation, and take a deeper dive into discussions around Project sustainability.

Former CDSS Director Will Lightbourne provided the opening remarks where he reflected on the Project as an opportunity to innovate in the practice arena to better serve families. While Director Lightbourne acknowledged the challenges present, and the unknown variables of the federal government's and California's FFPSA implementation, he discussed that various California child welfare and probation reforms could help with sustaining Project lessons and successes. For example, the Continuum of Care Reform, the use of Child and Family Teaming and the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths assessment implementation can all be vehicles for Title IV-E Project sustainability.

On the second day of the Annual Meeting, Pete Cervinka, CDSS Chief Deputy Director for Benefits and Services, discussed six important questions to reflect on related to the Project:

WHAT
are we
doing?

WHY
are we
doing it?

WHAT
have we
learned so
far?

Do we
want to
continue
doing it?

WHAT
do we **need**
in order to
continue?

WHO
is going to do
what to make
it happen?



Chief Deputy Director Cervinka addressed each question as it relates to the Project.

"What are we doing?" i.e., the main activities being achieved under the IV-E Waiver are "child and family centered, strengths-based, needs-driven, individualized and involve ongoing case plan adaptation."

The reason for this approach, the "why" is that children, youth, and families can be better off with good social work that is engaging, empowering and which supports them.

HIGHLIGHTS CONTINUED

As for what has been learned so far, Chief Deputy Director Cervinka shared that the Project had resulted in learning that change and evaluating the child welfare system is difficult. He also stressed the importance of learning whether the Project interventions and program activities had the intended effect for children and if not, to make changes when necessary through a continuous quality improvement process.

When addressing the necessary elements to continue the work, Chief Deputy Director Cervinka recommended that everyone keep in mind four main factors impacting the environment in which the Project is ending and new reforms and legislation are being implemented: “the rules, people, time and money.”

- **The rules, he said, are implicit in the legislation and reforms occurring at the federal level and in the state.**
- **The people are those working with children and families, like those in attendance at the Annual Project Meeting.**

Chief Deputy Director Cervinka closed his remarks with a set of recommendations on how stakeholders can approach the end of the Project proactively and in preparation for either its definite end (as currently expected) or for its extension, pending an act from Congress.

“Do we want to continue what we are doing? Not only are the social work practices, services, and supports in CCR, the Core Practice Model and the IV-E Waiver now the law of the land, they also are the right things to be doing.”

Pete Cervinka

- **Time is an important factor because it dictates the deadlines by which counties should be spending down funds, reconciling contracts, training staff for the transition and beyond, and necessitates choices about which programs to sustain or end.**
- **Similarly, counties should take into account the funding-related factors that might change once the Project ends as well as the timing of the county budget cycle.**

“Do your part to justify why it should be renewed... raise your voice, connect with colleagues in other Waiver states... Weave a story of what you’ve done with Wraparound and SOP and how FFPSA may allow some of it to continue... most importantly, continue protecting children, youth and families.”

Pete Cervinka

Over the course of the two days, counties were able to enter in cross-county and inter-agency conversations about the Project, including a panel discussion on FFPSA implementation with state and federal representatives, an in-depth presentation from the evaluation team on the Interrupted Time Study analyses being used to measure some outcomes, and a presentation on the transition to traditional Title IV-E claiming and other fiscal elements.



Highlights from the Progress Report

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and Westat (i.e. the evaluation team), shared a Project Evaluation Status Report in November of 2018. This report included:

- **A description of evaluation activities during April through September 2018;**
- **An outline of evaluation activities scheduled through March 2019;**
- **A description of some of the process study methods and findings from the 2018 site visit focus groups;**
- **A summary of recently completed outcomes analyses, regression analyses and interrupted time series analysis of probation recidivism outcomes;**
- **An examination of the evaluation team's findings in their efforts to identify treatment and comparison cohorts in each probation county to measure, to the degree possible, the relationship between receipt of Wraparound services and recidivism; and**
- **A detailed description of the cost study analyses and analyses' results to date.**

The evaluation team's activities through March include working on analyzing qualitative data collected through interviews with the participating counties; disseminating, collecting and analyzing the parent/guardian survey; and working with probation teams on clarifying data structure to ensure accurate representation of recidivism trends. Additionally, when the data from the California Department of Health Care Services can be obtained, the evaluation team will analyze mental health claims data.

Evaluation Report Highlights

Children in San Diego County placed out of home experienced increased placement stability over time.

In Los Angeles, there was a noteworthy improvement in placement stability.

In San Francisco, time to adoption for very young children has improved since the Project began.

In Sonoma County, among children ages 0–2, in the years since the Project began, reunification appears to be happening more rapidly.

A Bridge to FFPSA: County led efforts advocating for a waiver extension

With Waiver authority scheduled to expire on September 30, 2019, several of the Well-Being Project counties (including [Los Angeles](#) and [Sacramento](#)) have been reaching out to county, state and federal leadership to make the case for an extension. Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) have introduced bipartisan legislation titled [State Flexibility for Family First Transitions Act](#), to extend the Title IV-E waiver for two years through Fiscal Year 2021, effectively serving as a bridge between the Waiver and Family First implementation, and ensure there is no gap in the services provided to children and families during the Waiver. A companion bill on the Congressional side is anticipated. According to Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services Director Bobby Cagle: “The Waiver allowed us to fund services and supports beyond just foster care — services to help keep children safe and out of foster care in the first place. Now that Family First is the law of the land, time to transition from the Waiver is critical in order to ensure continuity of care for our most vulnerable children, and prevent disruption of services.”

What's Next for the Well-Being Project

- **Evaluation Steering Committee: April 4, 2019, Conference Call**
- **SOP Collaborative: May 14, 2019, San Diego, CA**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PROJECT SUPPORT ACTIVITIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

[California Well-Being Project Website](#)

[California Department of Social Services](#)

744 P Street, MS8-11-86, Sacramento, CA 95814

Phone: (916) 651-6600

IV-EWaiver@dss.ca.gov